DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 528 CE 085 603

TITLE	The Status of Reporter Education: Trends and Analysis.
PUB DATE	2003-09-00
NOTE	17p.; Produced by National Court Reporters Association, Council on Approved Student Education. Revision of the June 2002 report.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.ncraonline.org/education/schools/report/index.shtml.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Clerical Occupations; *Court Reporters; Demand Occupations; Dropout Characteristics; Dropouts; Employment Patterns; Employment Statistics; Enrollment Rate; *Enrollment Trends; Keyboarding (Data Entry); *Labor Needs; National Standards; Office Occupations Education; Postsecondary Education; Public Opinion; Shorthand; Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; *Student Recruitment; Typewriting

ABSTRACT

National Court Reporters Association (NCRA)-approved court reporting programs offer a curriculum based on criteria and standards in "General Requirements and Minimum Standards." Declining enrollments have resulted in closure of reporter programs of all sizes and institution type. Factors negatively affecting public perception of court reporting as a career are media reports that predict its replacement by alternative technologies; negative media reports on reporter performance in high-profile cases; and reporters' negative statements on declining financial opportunities and working conditions. Individual schools' aggressive promotion increases enrollments. The rate at which students exit programs prior to graduation has not worsened, but moderately improved; yet it remains at an unacceptably high level. Reasons cited are program difficulty; extremely complex manual dexterity, mental skills, and excellent language skills required; and cost. Successful students are single, childless, employed part-time or not at all, avid readers, and enrolled full-time; have good grammar and keyboarding skills; and have received faculty motivation. NCRA's student recruitment and education initiative integrates programs of work in these four key areas: public relations to improve the profession's image; emphasis on student recruitment; reinventing realtime reporter education; and a federal initiative. NCRA has renewed its commitment to promoting higher levels of education. (YLB)

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NCRA
Guardians of the Record

The Status of Reporter Education: Trends and Analysis

(June 2002, revised September 2003)

This white paper provides a view of the current situation within reporter education, taking into account such issues as the decline in the number of reporting students, the decline in the number of reporting programs, how the reporting profession is perceived, and NCRA's student recruitment and education initiatives to reverse these trends. The purpose of this white paper is to establish a benchmark from which NCRA can continue to move forward in strengthening reporter education programs and increasing the number of graduates in an effort to eliminate the current shortage of professional reporters.

Court Reporter Programs: NCRA Approval

Court reporting programs approved by the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) offer a curriculum based on the criteria and standards contained in the *General Requirements and Minimum Standards* (GRMS)[1]. This document was developed in conjunction with the advent of the approval program in the 1960s. The purpose behind approval was to establish a method of influencing the curriculum offered in reporting programs, raise standards[2], and insure a continuous stream of graduates into the profession. While not all reporting programs are approved, and there are many fine non-approved programs, the approval process does offer a means to monitor the state of reporter education by collecting statistics and observing trends. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most court reporting programs, whether approved or not, model their curriculum and attempt to meet the standards established in the *GRMS*.

The criteria and standards governing approved programs and contained in the *GRMS* are revised, at a minimum, every three years. For example, in 1998, new requirements were added mandating that only machine shorthand theories that meet realtime theory guidelines be taught. (There are currently 6 theories on the approved list.) Because any program seeking approval must be licensed or approved by the state in which it operates or accredited by a body recognized

[1] These standards can be found at www.NCRAonline.org/education/schools/standards/index.shtml

[2] It should be emphasized that the GRMS establishes **minimum** standards and is not, in and of itself, a guarantee of program excellence. The truly exceptional programs, regardless of whether they are approved or not, exceed the minimum standards required for NCRA program approval.

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by the U. S. Department of Education, revisions were approved in 1999 that eliminated standards in the *GRMS* that are already covered through state regulation and/or accreditation, in order to avoid redundancy and (potentially) conflicts between relevant state and federal regulation of education, generally, and the *GRMS*. This year's revision to the standards includes specific learning outcomes for Captioning and CART curricula in addition to Judicial Reporting.

Because of the annual reporting requirements associated with maintaining program approval, NCRA possesses far more and far better data on enrollments, graduation rates, dropout rates and other key aspects of reporter education for NCRA-approved programs than for non-approved programs.

Court Reporter Programs: Number of Programs

In 1975, there were 42 NCRA-approved court reporting programs as noted in *Celebrating Our Heritage*, a history of the Association and its programs published in honor of NCRA's 75th anniversary. (No data is available on the number of non-approved programs in existence then.) In 1995, there were 114 approved programs (and 267 non-approved). Today there are 70 approved programs (and approximately 70 non-approved).

In percentage terms, non-approved programs have closed at a substantially higher rate than NCRA-approved programs. Specifically, since 1995, 28% of approved programs have closed, as compared to 73% of non-approved.

At first, it appeared that mostly private schools were shutting their doors. Today, this is no longer the case. Declining enrollments have resulted in the closure of programs of all sizes and institution type. And it is not simply marginal or weak programs that are closing. Many fine schools are "teaching out"[3] their current reporting students and then will be discontinuing their court reporting programs altogether. We are currently faced with the imminent loss of up to 3 quality court reporting programs in the near future.

Court Reporter Programs: By Institution Type

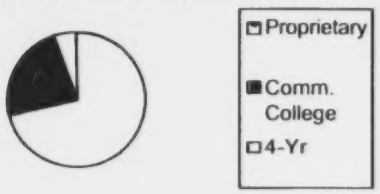
In 1995, there were 114 approved programs. Of these, 71% were proprietary or not-for-profit private schools; 24% were community colleges or state/county-supported vocational schools; 5% were traditional four-year colleges, public and private.

Today, of the 70 remaining approved programs, 47% are private schools; 44% are community colleges; 8% are four-year programs (2 public, 5 private).

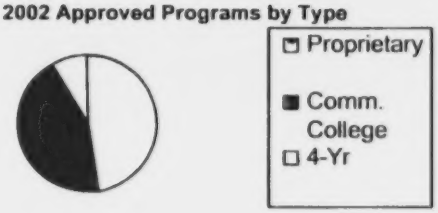
[3] No new enrollments are being accepted. Currently enrolled students will be allowed to complete their studies.

The following charts illustrate this demographic shift.

1995 Approved Programs by Type



2002 Approved Programs by Type



Enrollment Statistics

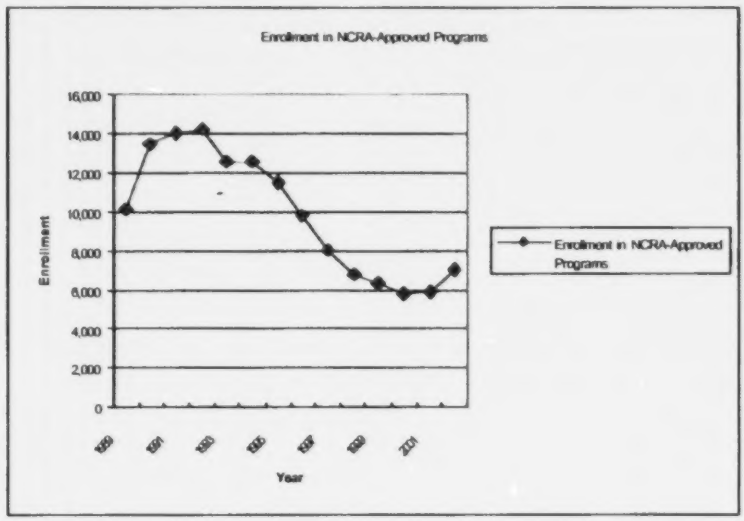
Each year, NCRA requires all approved programs to submit an Annual Report, which includes statistical information on enrollment, dropouts, and graduates, as well as changes in faculty and program. The chart below presents enrollment figures since 1989 in approved programs. (Similar data from non-approved programs is not available.)

Year	Enrollment in NCRA -Approved Programs	Change in Enrollment	No. of NCRA-Approved Programs
1989	10,125	-----	92
1990	13,466	+ 32.0%	91
1991	14,004	+ 3.0%	97
1992	14,202	+ 1.0%	99
1993	12,547	- 11.0%	102
1994	12,543	0.0%	108
1995	11,469	- 8.0%	114
1996	9,803	- 14.0%	106
1997	8,010	- 18.0%	101
1998	6,735	- 15.0%	91
1999	6,308	- 6.0%	87
2000	5,726	- 9.0%	85
2001	5,885	+ 2.8%	82
2002	7,021	+ 19.0%	72

From the Summary of Annual Reports, November 2002

For post-secondary education, in general, fluctuations in enrollment rates are, to a degree, cyclical and driven by factors not directly related to any particular profession. For example, when the economy is good, potential students go to work and bypass post-secondary education; when the economy is in decline, people retreat into further schooling to upgrade their skills and improve their marketability in a tight employment market.

As noted on the chart below, a peak in enrollments was reached in the early 1990s, at which time enrollment rates hit a plateau before going into a steady decline. A very modest (2.8%) increase in enrollment occurred last year, but it is too early to assess whether this could be the beginning of a reverse trend.



From Summary of Annual Reports, November 2002

The ***perceived*** state of a profession impacts whether it is viewed as an attractive career opportunity by potential students (and their parents), and such perceptions (whether accurate or incorrect) are reflected in enrollment trends. Factors negatively affecting the public perception of court reporting as a career include:

- **Media reports regarding the future of the profession, predicting its imminent replacement by alternative technologies;**

- **Negative media reports on reporter performance in high-profile cases (such as the Routier case in Texas); and**

- **Negative statements from current reporters on declining financial opportunities and working conditions**. Debates internal to the profession on such issues as electronic recording, stenomask/voice writers, consolidation and contracting, have resulted in significant segments of the reporter community holding extremely pessimistic views on

the future earning potential and working conditions for the profession. Such attitudes are often picked up and reported in the media.

Moreover, this has created a powerful source of negative word of mouth, which has downgraded the current reporter population as an important source of student recruitment. Most current reporters will cite the encouragement of a working reporter as the critical element in their own decision to enter the profession.

While perceptions of the profession have an impact, actual market conditions are also significant factors in affecting student enrollment numbers. Unfortunately, because of the length of time it takes to complete their education, he school enrollment and professional market cycles are out of alignment. The depressed freelance market in the late 1990s deterred enrollments, resulting in an inadequate number of students entering the system then, who would now have reached or be near to graduation and prepared to enter the work force as that market is recovering.

Awareness of the profession and generic promotion of court reporting as a career is part of the story. Another and potentially more significant factor is the level of marketing and student recruitment conducted by the individual schools themselves. While in-depth data is not available, anecdotal evidence confirms the logical assumption that those schools that promoted their programs aggressively enrolled more students. In particular, the adequacy of resources within the schools that are devoted to follow up on student prospects appears to be a particular weakness in many school programs. Student recruitment processes in many court reporting programs are extremely passive (mail out information and wait for the application to be returned) in an environment when other educational institutions have become very aggressive in pursuing enrollments.

Graduation Rates

The chart below presents the number of graduates from approved programs since 1989. (No data is available for non-approved programs.)

Year	Number Enrolled	Number Graduated	Graduates as Percentage of Entire Enrollment
1989	10,125	1,018	10.0%
1990	13,466	962	7.0%
1991	14,004	1,247	8.0%
1992	14,202	1,123	7.9%
1993	12,547	1,276	10.1%
1994	12,543	1,136	9.0%
1995	11,469	1,103	9.6%

Year	Number Enrolled	Number Graduated	Graduates as Percentage of Entire Enrollment
1996	9,803	901	9.2%
1997	8,010	793	9.9%
1998	6,735	655	9.7%
1999	6,308	475	7.5%
2000	5,726	521	9.1%
2001	5,885	439	7.4%
2002	7,021	353	5.0%

From Summary of Annual Reports, November 2002

There has been no consistent trend when comparing the number of graduates from any given year to the total enrollment (expressed as a percentage), ranging from a low of 7.0% to a high of 10.1%. The average is 8.9%.

Since approved programs make up 54% of the remaining reporter education institutions, one could extrapolate that there could be as many as 10,000 students enrolled nationwide, with as many as 900 graduates this past year[4].

Dropout Rates

The following statistics from NCRA-approved programs indicate the percentage of students who are dismissed, withdraw, transfer to a reporting program at another school, transfer to a different program within the institution, or take a job before they graduate:

[4] Such an estimate is conjectural, however. It rests upon an assumption that the profile and demographics of the pool of approved programs (e.g., the number of large, medium and small programs) are substantially the same as for non-approved programs. Since NCRA has data on approved programs but not for non-approved programs, there is no way to determine whether this is, in fact, the case.

Given the substantially higher number of non-approved programs that have closed over the past 8 years, one could reasonably argue that the approved programs are stronger and will have larger enrollments. If this were the case, the straight-line extrapolation would be overstated. Conversely, one could argue that to have survived, the remaining non-approved programs will be disproportionately from the stronger (higher enrollment) schools within that cohort. If this were the case, the straight-line extrapolation would be understated.

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Year	Percentage Transferred to Another Court Reporting Program	Percentage Entering the Profession Without Graduating	Percentage Transferred to Another Major	Other	Percentage Dismissed	Percentage Voluntary Withdrawal[5]	COMBINED TOTAL
1997	3%	1%	7%	2%	3%	22%	**38%**
1998	2%	1%	3%	1%	3%	26%	**36%**
1999	3%	1%	3%	1%	4%	23%	**35%**
2000	3%	1%	3%	1%	4%	27%	**39%**
2001	2%	1%	2%	1%	4%	25%	**35%**
2002	1%	1%	1%	1%	4%	21%	**29%**

Extracted from Summary of Annual Reports, November 2002

Contrary to commonly held assumptions, the rate at which students are exiting court reporting programs prior to graduation is ***not*** worsening, and has, in fact, moderately improved over the past five years. It remains, nonetheless, at an unacceptably high level.

The federal government definition used to track and report dropout rates characterizes any student who starts a particular program but does not complete ***that program at that institution*** as a "dropout." As such, federal government figures include as dropouts some students who stay in the reporting profession (e.g., who transfer to a court reporting program at a different school or enter the reporting job market prior to graduation) as well as some students who continue education in other fields (e.g., who "change majors"). As the data above indicates, this definition can overstate the number of students who start but do not complete a court reporting education by 3 to 5%, and overstates those who drop out and fail to complete any post-secondary education by 7 to 13% in any given year.

The reasons most commonly cited by students who drop out of a court reporting program are:

- The difficulty of the program;
- The extremely complex manual dexterity required for average success;
- The mental skills required;
- The need for excellent language skills;[6]
- Personal factors; and
- The cost involved.

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[5] Voluntary Withdrawals indicate students who have elected to leave school for lack of program interest or ability or for personal reasons; a small number may return.

[6] High school graduates in the last decade present a well-documented and severe decline in language proficiency, when compared to graduates in prior years. This deficiency has a significant (and negative) impact on potential court reporting students' capacity to master any kind of theory and perform successfully in a profession requiring superior language ability.

Surveys and interviews with court reporting faculty suggest that the most frequent points for students to exit from court reporting training occur during the first two weeks on up through theory training, and at speed levels up to the 140-160 range. While speed "plateaus" are sometimes experienced by students at higher speeds, the occurrence of dropouts among students at or above the 200 wpm level are rare.

Reporting schools are offering an increasingly diverse range of options to students (either as an entry-level career, prior to transitioning into reporting, or as a fallback for students withdrawing from reporting.) Schools with court reporting programs often offer programs in the following areas:

- Medical transcription (nearly half of all approved schools currently offer this course of study)
- Scoping
- Paralegal
- Text entry
- Legal assistant
- Secretarial

Again, it is important to note that students leaving the court reporting program in favor of one of these programs of study, even when successfully placed in jobs in these career areas, are counted as "dropouts" in court reporting education statistics.

Adding some perspective to this issue, a 2001 study released by ACT (formerly the American College Testing Program)[7] of ***all*** two-year institutions suggests that the court reporting education system is by no means unique in its dropout and time to completion experience: 45.4% of college freshmen entering two-year programs in 2000 did not return for a second year.

Time to Complete Programs

It is difficult to precisely calculate the length of time required to complete programs, because students are continuously entering the program in semesters, quarters, trimesters, monthly, or even weekly. Other students are transferring in, transferring out, relocating, taking a break in their studies, transferring to other programs, or jobbing out. This makes it impossible to track the progress of a given "class" from the time it enters a court reporting program to graduation. Post-graduation surveys of successful students and review of individual student transcripts do produce some indication of the total time needed to complete court reporting education.

Contrary to commonly held assumptions, empirical data does ***not*** support the contention that it takes significantly longer today for students to successfully complete their court reporting education. Research conducted in 1994 and again in 2000[8] indicates no change in the average amount of "in school" time needed to complete a reporting program: **33.3 months.** This

[7] This study can be found at the ACT web site www.act.org/news/releases/2001/04-26-01.html

[8] NCRA survey of approved programs.

translates into nearly four years to complete reporter training, if attending on a 9 months per year basis, or nearly three years of attending 33 months without a break.

This estimate is confirmed by a 2000 study [9] indicating the length of time necessary to complete studies as follows:

Number of Years	Percent
2 years	35%
3 years	30%
4 years	19%
5 years	5%
More than 5 years	11%

Gaede Study, 2000

Again, comparing court reporting programs to the general post-secondary school population proves instructive. While 65% of graduates from NCRA-approved court reporting programs completed their program in three years or less, the previously cited ACT [10] study indicate that in 2000, an all-time low number of students from ***all*** two-year colleges (37.0%) graduated within three years, and this number has been steadily dropping since 1992.

A 2001 survey[11] conducted by the California Court Reporters Association indicates a substantially longer time is needed to complete court reporter training in that state. Specifically, this survey indicates it takes "a full-time day school student 64 months to become a licensed CSR in California, as compared to 42 months in 1986-87." The unique nature of the profession in that state (highly regulated, a CSR test substantially different from the RPR, and no reciprocity with other states' licensing exams) makes it difficult to draw reliable conclusions on the root cause for the difference in experience in California, as compared to national averages.

Tuition and Student Demographics

The average total program tuition[12] is somewhere between $8,000 for public schools and around $20,000 for private. Many students (and/or their parents/spouses) pay their own tuition. While some also receive federal financial aid in the form of loans and grants, the majority does not.

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[9] Gaede, Donna M. *Factors Affecting Machine Shorthand Skill Development Required for Registered Professional Reporter Certification.* (Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Master of Science Degree in Education, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 2000).

[10] The complete study can be found at www.act.org/news/releases/2001/04-26-01.html

[11] Gary Cramer of the California Court Reporters Association (CCRA) surveyed court reporters who passed the state licensing examination between May 1998 and June 2001. This CCRA report may be found on www.cal-ccra.org/2SummitReport.pdf under Appendix A.

[12] NCRA Survey of Approved Court Reporting Programs, November 2000.

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According to the NCRA Survey of Approved Court Reporting programs conducted in November 2000, only 3% of students are under 20 years of age, which indicates that reporting does not attract the traditional college-bound student. (20% of students in the 2001 Gaede study indicated they held an academic degree prior to entering a court reporting program[13].) The majority of students are between the ages of 26-30.

A significant portion of court reporting students face competing obligations for their time and energy. The Gaede study[14] indicates that:

- 30% of students worked full time and 51% worked part time while pursuing their court reporting education;
- 16% of students had their education interrupted for a significant period (39% of these averaged an interruption of 3 months duration; 32% of these averaged an interruption of 3 years);
- 4% described their enrollment as "intermittent";
- 11% were married without children;
- 16% were married with at least one child;
- 4% were single parents with at least one child;
- The average age of these children was 6.9 years; and
- 12% of female respondents reported having a pregnancy while attending court reporting school.

While the total "in school" time required to complete court reporting education has remained fairly constant, all of these factors may affect the period of time required to complete the course of study.

Student Success Factors

The Gaede study also documented a number of factors that were characteristic of those individuals who had a higher degree of success as court reporting students and in achieving the RPR certification:

- Single, with no child or parental responsibilities
- Worked part time while a student or not at all
- Possessed good grammar and keyboarding skills
- Played a musical instrument
- Were avid readers

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[13] Gaede, *op. cit.*, page 27.

[14] *Ibid.*

- Enrolled continuously as full-time students
- Received faculty motivation
- Received live dictation between 8–15 hours per week, with practice from tapes between 2-7 hours per week

Testing Speed

NCRA-approved programs are required to prepare students who can transcribe a minimum of three five-minute, two-voice testimony tests with a minimum of 95% accuracy dictated at a minimum of 225 wpm[15]. This standard has been in place since 1973. 225 wpm is the highest speed tested in the skills portion of the RPR.

25 of the 33 states with state licensure tests mirror these requirements. However, 8 states use a lower standard, testing at no higher than 200 wpm[16].

In the past year, a few states have seen efforts made to either lower the speed required for graduation/licensure (to the 200 wpm level) or to oppose efforts to bring existing lower speed standards up to the 225 wpm levels. Proponents are generally schools facing pressures to demonstrate higher/faster graduation rates and firm owners seeking more graduates to employ. It is doubtful that such measures would result in significant improvements in graduation rates[17]. As indicated earlier in this white paper, most students drop out much earlier in their education (upon introduction of theory or midway through the program), ***not*** when they are at the 200 wpm level.

Realtime Theory

Some have also questioned the impact of realtime theory guidelines on graduation rates.

While the *GRMS* for NCRA-approved reporter education programs does ***not*** require graduates to meet any realtime performance standards, since 1998 it has required that the writing theory taught meet certain guidelines. The underlying rationale of these *Theory Text Guidelines*[18] is to establish a sound foundation for the student's continued improvement as a writer and ensure that he or she does not become locked into writing habits that would create an obstacle to building up to realtime capability as a graduate. A recent review of these guidelines by educators, reporters and firm owners with expertise in training and certification confirmed that the *Theory Text*

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[15] Additionally, proficiency at 200 wpm on jury charge and 180 wpm literary, also with 95% accuracy, is required.

[16] These states are California, Georgia (B test only), Iowa, Nevada, New York (voluntary), Oklahoma, Washington, and West Virginia (voluntary for freelance reporters).

[17] The issue of lowering speed standards as a response to the shortage of available reporters is the subject of some debate. While some parties argue that allowing students to graduate and/or certify at an apprentice level and then increase proficiency on the job is an appropriate response to the current shortage, others argue that certifying at such low speeds will only result in underqualified reporters in the work force, to the detriment of the profession and its customers.

[18] The *Guidelines* can be found at www.ncraonline.org/education/schools/standards/index.shtml#guidelines

Guidelines are minimalist in nature and should not be the source of delay in achieving basic competency needed to graduate and/or achieve certification.

Serious concern has been raised, however, that while nothing in the *Guidelines* requires that the theories be so complex, some of the writing theories commonly being taught ***are*** excessively stroke intensive and are slowing down students' progress. Schools and their faculty have wide latitude to make changes in order to simplify the published theories as they are actually taught and may do so without putting their program's approval in jeopardy (provided they stay within the *Guidelines).*

While theory simplification would undeniably have a positive effect, as discussed above, the data shows that the percentage of graduates today as related to the total enrollment in approved programs has ***not*** materially changed since the introduction of realtime theories or the NCRA *Guidelines,* nor has the length of time to complete an education seen any increase.

NCRA's Student Recruitment and Education Initiatives

In light of the inadequate number of realtime reporters to meet current demand and the inadequate number of students entering reporter education programs to supply future needs, NCRA has engaged in a wide range of activities to rectify this situation. These include efforts to:

- Improve the image of the profession in order to attract top-quality students.
- Stimulate student recruitment.
- Reinvent realtime reporter education to make it more accessible, affordable and effective.
- Provide direct assistance to schools to help upgrade curricula, modernize delivery systems, and improve student recruitment effectiveness.
- Create funding sources for schools to implement these changes.

This has led to a strategy that integrates programs of work in four key areas:

1. Public Relations to Improve the Profession's Image

The following activities have focused on improving the profession's image. NCRA has:

- Placed hundreds of career articles in newspapers and magazines over the past four-plus years. This results from continued mailings and contacts with 300 career writers and editors, in addition to having court reporting included in the Associated Press's annual career information, which is distributed to its more than 1,500 subscribing newspapers across the United States.
- Worked closely with the Bureau of Labor Statistics to ensure that the description in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, a career guide used by career counselors and publications, notes that employment for court reporters, CART providers and broadcast captioners is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations through 2010;

that the demand for realtime writers will increase; and that NCRA certification will lead to better job opportunities.

- Reserved space at the December 2002 and 2003 Association for Career and Technical Education conference, allowing us to showcase judicial reporting, captioning and CART careers, and is pursuing opportunities for strategic partnering opportunities with this group.

- Responded aggressively to correct or rebut negative news stories, wherever possible.

2. Emphasis on Student Recruitment

The following activities have focused on recruiting students. NCRA has:

- Placed print advertisements promoting the profession over an 11-month period in 1999 in three national magazines.

- Run commercials in the first two weeks of April 2001 on five national cable TV channels. Furthermore, at the beginning of last year, we ran commercials on CNN Headline News thanks to VITAC's assistance. Cumulatively, more than 100 career promotion commercials were broadcast to national audiences.

- Created 10-, 15- and 30-second TV commercials that are available to reporting schools at cost for customization and use in their local markets.

- Generated 10,400 leads on individuals interested in considering court reporting schools, which have been passed on to schools for follow-up. Leads continue to be generated at a rate of approximately 200 per month, and are now immediately delivered, electronically, to the schools.

- Sent a brochure mailing to 38,000 high school guidance counselors.

- Introduced www.bestfuture.com, NCRA's career Web site. Every month, approximately 200 prospect leads from the Web site are given to NCRA-approved programs.

- Emphasized the Tech-Prep program. NCRA's Tech-Prep Program Development Task Force prepared a detailed guide on how to initiate and conduct a Tech-Prep program, utilizing federal funding earmarked for that program, to provide college-level credits for stenotype training in high schools. These students can then transfer the credit to a reporting program upon graduation from high school.

- Conducted a free one-day seminar for schools on recruiting tactics and how to identify, follow up with and close on prospects.

- Created bookmarks, posters and postcards for use by schools in following up with prospects.

- Initiated a policy of providing career brochures free to members (100 limit) and approved schools and affiliated associations (500 limit).

- Offered an online community of support through the Virtual Mentors Program to current reporting students to help them stay motivated and solve problems as they work their way through school.

3. Reinventing Realtime Reporter Education

A multi-prong effort is currently underway for reinventing realtime reporter education. NCRA is:

- Making education delivery more affordable, accessible and effective. The distance learning focus allows for school partnerships to improve the depth and quality of the curriculum, while expanding the reach of reporter education across the country.

- Reworking the education process to recognize specialties. NCRA's Council on Approved Student Education is developing standards for teaching CART and captioning, in addition to enhancing the training for realtime writers.

- Reworking the certification process to recognize specialties. NCRA's CRR Certifications Task Force has developed certifications specifically for CART providers (Certified CART Provider) and captioners (Certified Broadcast Captioners) to make them distinct from NCRA's current CRR, which will be specialized for judicial reporters.

- Exploring opportunities for working reporters to apply work/life experiences toward college degrees gained via distance learning.

- Providing direct support to schools, helping them to help themselves and implement these changes. This includes:

  - Hiring an education consultant, working full time to help programs plan and implement changes in curriculum, recruiting and education delivery.

  - Giving state leaders presentation materials on these Education Initiatives and explaining how they can play a role in supporting schools.

  - Offering beginning and advanced training in developing distance learning courses at NCRA's Teachers' Workshops.

  - Hosting a one-day Tech Prep Workshop.

  - Offering several two-day intensive faculty training on delivering CART and captioning courses.

  - Investigating discounted equipment acquisition opportunities for schools.

4. Federal Initiative

NCRA's Federal Initiative seeks to obtain federal funds to give court reporting programs the wherewithal to make the changes necessary to reinvigorate the reporter education system in America.

In 2000, NCRA successfully lobbied Congress to fund a $500,000 pilot/demonstration program at the University of Mississippi.

In 2001, we achieved NCRA's greatest legislative victory to date, securing funding totaling $5.75 million for 14 reporting programs across the country.

In 2003, we introduced legislation, *The Training for Realtime Writers Act of 2003*. This legislation, if passed, would authorize $60 million over the next three years for court reporting schools. Currently, 100 Representatives have signed on as co-sponsors to the House bill; 39 Senators are co-sponsors on the Senate bill.

In addition, NCRA continues to pursue individual grant requests, as we did in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Currently, 35 schools have requests pending.

The Federal funds can be used by schools for:

- Recruiting students;
- Curriculum development;
- Infrastructure improvements, equipping the schools with state-of-the-art training facilities;
- Scholarships;
- Developing and implementing a distance learning component; and
- Career placement assistance for graduates.

Promoting Higher Levels of Education

Writing skill makes up only a part of the education necessary for the competent reporter. There are knowledge competencies essential both to the performance of the reporting function in various professional environments and to the ability of the reporter to comprehend and accurately write the content of the spoken language being transcribed. The *GRMS* outlines minimum areas that must be covered in the curricula for the judicial court reporting programs; curricula for CART and captioning programs will be added to the *GRMS* this year.

For many years, however, there have been general recognition of a need to upgrade the level of education in the reporting profession and significant debate over the best means to accomplish this goal.

NCRA began serious study of whether a four-year degree should be encouraged if not required for court reporters in 1987. In 1995, having concluded that a four-year college degree was critical to the future success of its members and the profession, the NCRA Board of Directors adopted a policy that would have required all reporters earning their RPR in 2006 or later to have a four-year degree[19].

A critical component of the strategy for introducing the four-year degree was articulation agreements, or the ability for credits earned at one school to be transferred to another, and for credits to be granted for life experience gained outside the formal education environment. Proponents of the articulation approach hoped to enable students to attend traditional court reporting programs to attain the required skill and competence in the strictly reporter-related subjects and then transfer those credits to a four-year college to get the academic subjects required to complete their degree[20].

In 1982, NCRA successfully won American Council on Education (ACE) approval to grant college credit for the RPR and RMR certifications. Reporters can receive 21 credits for their RPR and three credits for their RMR at any of the 1,500 colleges and universities that accept ACE credit recommendations.

In practice, however, it proved extremely difficult to implement broader articulation agreements between educational institutions due to the inconsistent and often conflicting terms dictated by accreditation bodies or as a result of the structure of programs in non-court reporting colleges and universities. Readily available, accessible and affordable opportunities for court reporting students to complete a degree did not develop. As a result, in March 2000, the NCRA Board of Directors rescinded the mandate that future RPR testing include a four-year degree requirement.

At the same time, the board renewed its commitment to promoting higher levels of education in the reporting profession and to taking concrete steps to ensure that affordable, accessible and effective options for achieving this goal are available to both working reporters and students. NCRA's educational initiatives, particularly in the areas of curriculum redesign, distance learning and school partnerships, will further advance this goal.

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[19] There was no requirement for existing RPRs to earn a degree, although the association has sought to encourage and facilitate the efforts of reporters to do so.

[20] Another advantage of this approach would be to give withdrawing (or dropout) students transferable college credit they could use to start over at some other school.

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Author(s): National Court Reporters Association (NCRA)	
Corporate Source: (NCRA)	Publication Date: June 2002

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